

SUSTAINABILITY BRIEF

Update from the field

December 2016

Unsung Heroes of the Forest

Often we read in the media about the brave acts of policemen successfully nabbing dangerous criminals, saving victims from harm and ensuring law and order in the society; or about iconic wildlife facing threats of extinction due to rampant illegal hunting activities.

Little is mentioned or reported about the valiant forest rangers working outside the boundaries of concrete jungles and in the frontline of war with poachers. These are the unsung heroes from the forest, one of whom is John Anak Alit.

John Anak Alit is our High Conservation Value (HCV) Assistant Manager. Originally from Sarawak, East Malaysia, he has been working with PPB Oil Palms Bhd (PPBOP), a subsidiary of Wilmar International Limited, since 2011. Based in Saremas Plantation in Sarawak, he became an honorary ranger, a voluntary vocation, in 2015, and most recently was conferred the “Outstanding Honorary Wildlife Ranger” award by the Chief Minister of Sarawak in November 2016.



John Anak Alit receiving the “Outstanding Honorary Wild Life Ranger” award from the Chief Minister of Sarawak

In states like Sabah and Sarawak where poaching and illegal logging activities are rampant but where government resources are limited, ranger volunteers like John Alit and other Wilmar employees are a force to be reckoned with, as they help to keep those illegal activities at bay.

Despite knowing that the work of a ranger can be dangerous at times and there is no monetary compensation, John sees it as an honour to serve his beloved Sarawak State by helping to reduce illegal activities in and protect its forests. So when the first opportunity to be part of the ranger volunteer corp came up, he immediately signed up for it.

To be a qualified ranger, John and his colleagues underwent a three-day training by the Sarawak Forest Corporation, and were taught essential skills and knowledge in the relevant State laws, law enforcement tactics, surveillance and procedures on reporting to the authorities. This is in addition to a three-month identity check by the Malaysian Police Department in Kuala Lumpur, including scans for past criminal records, prior to the training.

According to John Alit, all these efforts and work are worthwhile. “Since the establishment of PPBOP’s Honorary Game Warden Programme in Sarawak in March 2015, we have observed a reduction in encounters with poachers and people with guns moving into our conservation area.”

The work of a ranger is multi-faceted which goes beyond just patrolling the forest; a typical day in John Anak Alit’s ranger duty is illustrated below:



Briefing the team before starting their patrolling duty



Patrolling the forest conservation area



Setting up road blockades to conduct vehicle checks



Stopping vehicles to conduct checks for wild game on board

On whether he is concerned about safety when confronted with armed suspects, John said, “At times we encounter suspicious characters or poachers during our patrolling or road-block duty who can be quite aggressive, but we are adequately trained to handle such situations.”

Wilmar is the first plantation company in Sarawak to have an Honorary Game Warden Programme. As part of this programme, PPBOP had also conducted a series of awareness sessions on wildlife to the local indigenous communities around the conservation areas, and enlisted six headmen in the programme as Honorary Rangers.

More information about the Group’s ranger programme can be found [here](#).